

A Brief History of the History Department
of The Ohio State University

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When the University opened, September 17, 1873, seven departments were established, but there was no department of history. It was a period when the classical tradition was waning, but the "gentleman scholar" with a liberal education often taught general courses in history. Thus, President Edward Orton, a geologist soon gave instruction in General History, the Professor of Modern Languages gave a resume of French and German History, and the Professor of Latin taught Greek and Roman History. In 1879 a Department of History and Philosophy (including Psychology) was set up under John T. Short. The university organization was altered in 1881 to provide for a Department of History and English Language and Literature. Short resigned in 1883 due to health reasons and was succeeded briefly by Cynthia U. Weld.

The coming of George Welles Knight to head the Department in 1885 heralded a new era with the emergence of the professional historian. As late as 1884 the four hundred American institutions of higher learning had the services of only twenty full-time teachers of history. But, now the broadly educated "gentleman scholar" rapidly gave way to the teacher especially trained in history. The American Historical Association, the National organization of professional historians, was founded in 1884, and the American Historical Review was to be founded in 1895.

Knight, whose collegiate work had been taken at the University of Michigan, had received the first doctorate in history granted by that University, and his dissertation, History and Management of Land Grants for Education in the Northwest Territory, was issued in the first volume of monographs published under the auspices of the American Historical Association. In 1887, Departmental arrangements at Ohio State were altered to provide for a Department of History and Political Science. Knight was a man of independent means and went to Europe to study, 1889-1890, his place being filled temporarily by Professor John W. Queen. By 1898, the Department was divided into two separate divisions, American History (under Knight) and European History (under Wilbur H. Siebert).

Siebert was the son of a prominent family in Columbus and had taken graduate work at Harvard. He became an instructor at the Ohio State University in 1891, and over six decades he was to be the author of many works on the Loyalists of the American Revolution and on the Underground Railroad of anti-slavery years, although his courses in instruction were in European History. In 1902, Edgar H. McNeal came from the University of Chicago to begin forty-two years of service in the field of medieval history. In 1903, Henry R. Spencer who had taken graduate work at Columbia University joined the Department. In 1909, Spencer was made head of the newly created Department of Political Science, a position he was to hold until 1947. He continued to teach until 1949.

Homer C. Hockett joined the history Department in 1909 and became a noted authority on American frontier and constitutional history. He retired in 1942 and died in 1960. By 1913, about 250 students were enrolled in American History, with fifty of them in advanced classes. During this period members of the History Department were very active in civic and professional matters. Professor Knight was a prominent member of the Ohio Constitutional Convention of 1912 as a result of which over thirty amendments were made to the state constitution. For a number of years Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., later to be a Professor at Harvard was a very articulate member of the Department. Carl Wittke, who became a prominent authority on Ohio and Immigrant History became a full-time member of the Department in 1916. Arthur C. Cole, a well known writer on slavery and the Civil War taught in the Department, 1920 to 1929, as did Lawrence F. Hill, a scholar in Latin-American history, 1922 to 1959. In 1925, Professors Siebert and Knight were relieved of administrative duties. (Knight continued to teach until 1928 and died in 1932. Siebert later became Research Professor. He died in 1961 at the age of ninety-five.) The European and American History Departments were combined under the chairmanship of Wittke, a graduate of Ohio State who had received his doctorate at Harvard. He gave vigorous leadership

to the Department until 1937 when he became Dean of Oberlin College (and later Dean of the Graduate School of Western Reserve University.) Enrollment in the Department increased, and many new instructors served during the ensuing years in teaching the basic courses.

The first Ph.D. awarded in the Department was to John Kasvikis Warren in 1925 and the second to Ruth Loving Higgins who later became Dean of Beaver College in Pennsylvania. Beginning in 1928, each year saw the awarding of a number of doctorates by the Department, and many recipients have had noteworthy careers as historians, college deans, and presidents of educational institutions.

During the Depression and the World War II years, the Department faced the adjustments common to other academic areas. Several members of the Department served the country in military and civilian capacities, and special courses were given by the Department to units stationed on the campus.

In recent decades the following have served as chairman of the Department:
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George Washburne, a specialist in European Diplomacy and Imperialism (1938-1948); Lowell Ragatz, an authority on European expansion (1949-1953) who retired in 1967; Foster Rhea Dulles, author of numerous volumes on United States foreign policy and social history (1953-1958), who retired in 1965; Harold J. Grimm, a tireless researcher in Reformation History (1958-1966); Bradford Chapin, a specialist in American Colonial History (1966-1967); and Harry L. Coles, well known for his writings in Early National and American Military History (1967-).

Among those of long service in the Department mention may be made of Eugene H. Roseboom, a noted authority on Presidential elections in the United States who served as a full time teacher, 1919-1921 and 1923-1963; Henry H. Simms, author numerous biographies and works on Southern history, 1929-1966; and William F. McDonald who taught Greek and Roman History, 1931-1969.

For many decades basic courses in European and United States history have served a wide variety of students in various colleges of the University.

Scores of young teachers and scholars have served for one or more years in maintaining this instruction at a high level, and many have then gone on to more advanced academic duties at many institutions. During each quarter of 1968-1969 about 6,000 students were enrolled in the fundamental courses. At the same time the number of graduate students increased rapidly, many serving as Fellows or Teaching Assistants. At the same time the offerings in specialized courses were greatly diversified with instruction in such fields as Near Eastern, Polish, Russian, Balkan, Jewish, and Military history and the history of science.

The phenomenal growth of the Department over a quarter of a century is indicated by the fact that in 1944-45, on active duty in the Department were four full professors; three associate professors; three assistant professors; four instructors; and three graduate assistants. In 1969 there were fourteen full professors (with two more on leave); four associate professors (with one on leave); nine assistant professors; sixteen instructors; eighty teaching associates and assistants; and thirty-seven fellows.